



# RACISM AND WOMEN IN INDIA

Dr. Ghousia Nusrath Nisar

Associate Professor In English, Government First Grade College Hoskote

## ABSTRACT

Racism is prevalent even today in our nation, we hear about hate crimes committed as an act of racism. Our society is such that foreigners who are not citizens of this country are accepted wholeheartedly but their black counterparts have a different story to tell. It is generally believed that north India has more fair skinned people whereas the south Indian population is dark. The advertisements frequently displayed on our TV's make us believe that unless we have fair skins, we will not have better jobs or marriages. Our women from the northeast face continual harassment and humiliation because of their features. There are many incidents where they are targeted and become the victim of cruelty.

**KEYWORDS:** Skin Complexion, Campaigns, Colourism, Advertisements.

## INTRODUCTION

Racism is discriminating towards people based on certain attributes, traits and features. It differentiates between two groups of people and marks them as superior or inferior. A person is being racist when he displays the emotions of hatred, prejudice, bias and intolerance against another person solely due to his skin colour, structure of his lips, language, place of origin or any other attribute which he might have gained biologically. Various degrees of skin complexion are categorized as fair, wheatish, dusky, dark etc. In a racist environment, people with lighter side of the complexion are believed to be much more worthy than their darker skin counterparts. They are considered "pure" and get the respect, dignity and social status from society while the dark skinned people are associated with negative traits like ugliness and poverty and are left behind struggling for their rights.

India is a diverse country and a home for people belonging to different caste, religion, colour, creed, culture and traditions. Indians are known for their varied degrees of skin complexions ranging from fair skinned to dark skinned with the latter being the majority. Skin colour has always remained an important factor in determining a person's value and worth. Racism has been prevalent in India since the Rig Veda Period, followed by the Mughal era and the British rule.

The people were discriminated by class, caste and by their skin colour. There was a notion that dark skinned people belonged to lower castes, were less intelligent, less handsome, and held lower societal positions. Colourism has existed for ages and dark skinned people have always suffered. Their mental health, physical image, and self-esteem are always under question. Today along with being an issue associated with appearance and looks it is also a psychological issue related to depression and anxiety.

## Culture Prevalent Today

A 2016 World Health Organisation (WHO) survey found that almost 70% of Indian women use skin-lightening cosmetics. There are numerous cosmetic brands promoting skin lightening creams and lotions. Unilever and its Indian subsidiary Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) have been criticised extensively for

promoting colourism and making girls with darker shades feel insecure and inadequate. Fair and Lovely is India's largest selling skin lightening cream, with 24bn rupees in annual revenue (BBC World news). Ever since the 1970s when it first hit the market, millions of tubes are bought every year by teenagers and young women in a country where lighter skin is routinely equated with beauty. Top actors and actresses have appeared in advertisements to endorse a cream that promote fair skin as a means to finding love or a glamorous job.

61% of Indian women think that having fair skin is essential for social acceptance. Also 52% think it's important for finding a good husband (YouGov survey 2018). These statistics show how having a fair skin is considered ideal and is a deeply rooted notion. In a patriarchal society like India where women experience discrimination due to gender caste and creed, they also have to face prejudice due to their colour. For a girl growing up in India media, commercials, and her own family actively support colourism. Through their marketing for skin-lightening products, some brands in India aggressively encourage the idea that more fortune and bliss may result from having lighter skin. Even families prioritise finding a fair-skinned partner for their children, and some women experience bias at work because of their skin tone.

Recently US multinational Johnson and Johnson announced it would no longer produce or sell two of its creams which are popular in Asia and the Middle East over protests over stereotyping based on the colour of skin following the death of George Floyd in the US, but many people from Asia have objected to this saying anyone wanting to buy them should be allowed to. Consumer giant Unilever has said that it will rebrand its bestselling skin lightening cream Fair and Lovely and drop the word "fair" from its name.

There have been many campaigns against racism, such as "Dark is Beautiful" and "#unfairandlovely" which have questioned India's obsession with fair skin. Bollywood stars and popular beauty pageant winners have been called out on social media for promoting colourism. But these campaigns have not a big difference in the popularity of fairness creams, which are still widely used by a large number of customers from small town and

rural India who are unaware of the politics over skin colour.

### **Discrimination Against The Northeastern People**

Indians have a very basic and stereotypical notion about the north-east parts of India. The north-eastern people of India are subjected to frequent passing of comments by calling them “Chinki” or “Chinese” due to their distinct features common among their region but different from the rest of the Indians. Due to their Mongolian features they are compared with the people from China, Korea and Japan.

The people from the region feel insecure and isolated and there have been cases of assault, bullying and intolerance reported. It has almost become a daily affair to hear of North-eastern women being subjected to such abuse in Delhi, and the rest of India. Other women suffer similarly, but these women from the North-east, hundreds of miles away from home, often face the extra burden of fighting their cases alone. Most of the women are hard working, the backbones of their families both financially and emotionally. Losing their daughters shatters a family's dreams: it means life will never be the same again.

### **CONCLUSION**

Discrimination against race and colour brings down the morale and the confidence of those who experience it; they seldom get a chance to stand up and speak up or fight for their self. They experience lower self-esteem, self-worth and develop insecurity around their skin tone. It affects how people view their bodies, which can result in unhappiness and a negative body image. According to studies, discrimination based on skin tone might make people more stressed, depressed, and anxious. This can have long-term negative consequences on mental well-being. The impact is not just on the outer looks and beauty, and the women experiencing it might not be able to realize her true potential.

The problem of racism in India cannot be solved by one person; it is and should be taken up as a collective problem in the community. The mindset of the Indian society should be such that no matter what the skin tone is, what caste or origin a person belongs to, irrespective of all the other physical traits, a person is entitled to equality before the law and has every right to deserve the same respect and honour. We, as the people of India need to embrace cultural diversity, which means breaking down the rigid standards of beauty and accepting various characteristics like attire, accessories, and haircuts which set people from other cultures apart. We should encourage people to develop a positive self-image and cherish the qualities that make them unique.

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